

Subject: Testimony in support of SB 446

Aquatic invasive species have severely diminished the recreational and scenic quality of many Connecticut water bodies, and as a consequence have lowered the abutting property values and the property tax income for towns with these affected lakes. Unfortunately, this is happening just about everywhere in Connecticut. As the many different invasives, such as zebra mussels, milfoil, fanwort and water chestnut, advance and become established, the costs to control them will escalate exorbitantly for the State, towns and lake associations. While states like Maine and Wisconsin have multi-million dollar funds to deal with invasives, Connecticut's investment in this battle pales by comparison.

Presently, if this current level of State involvement and investment continues, the recreational desirability of CT lakes will decline much more resulting in a lower quality of life for CT residents, less tourism and a huge reduction in the local economies of those towns with recreational lakes and ponds.

For too long Connecticut has diverted money from the proper care and prevention needed for lakes. Around the US other states are doing much more. In the past Connecticut did more, but recently these monies have gone elsewhere to meet "current fiscal woes." Since 1970, PILOT funds (Payment In Lieu Of Taxes) totally about 2.4 million dollars annually representing about 50% of the annual boat registration monies went to towns with lakes for lakes. But, in 2009 these monies stopped, instead, going to the General Fund. Other monies such as the SEP funds (supplemental / unspent dollars) and some small percent of the boat motor fuel sales tax revenue also until recently went to towns with lakes.

So... it is obvious that the State has taken away what was theirs for years! It was bad, shortsighted economics because the AIS problem has escalated in severity in a short time. Since the costs of remediation or control are far greater than the costs of prevention, Connecticut will try to play "catch up."

The three very beneficial thrusts of SB 446 are on target to address Connecticut's AIS needs.

Grants to help towns and lake communities with known infestations not being treated or not being adequately treated will be very helpful because the spread always worsens whether by waterfowl or by connecting streams or rivers or by boaters going from lake to lake. A lot of State money is needed for this because the costs to study and treat over many years are staggering.

Increasing the number of launch monitors or BEAs to cover the 96 boat launch ramp areas is a crucial need. Currently there are just 23 monitors to inspect boats and trailers for "hitch-hiking" AIS and to hand out educational material. Most lakes are rarely visited resulting in minimal prevention and education. Eventually launch monitors should be present from April to November from dawn to sunset to check for AIS on incoming and departing boats.

Rapid response action for new infestations is very smart to control the spread and the costs to treat. Even short delays in intervention and treatment will be very costly.

I wholeheartedly applaud this bill and urge its passage and adequate funding this year! SB 446 and its implementation in 2014 is the wise and responsible approach to this AIS crisis!

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